Skill development

Mentoring: a Powerful Tool for Professional Development of Student Teachers

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1. Introduction

Distance education has emerged as a panacea for some of the burning problems in the education systems of developing countries. In relation to the Sri Lankan context, it was expected that Distance Education would give an answer to the shortage of qualified and experienced teaches in the school system. Therefore, from the inception, the Open University of Sri Lanka and the National Institute of Education offered programmes through the distance mode aiming at improving professional competences of teachers. These programmes were popular among teachers due to some inherent characteristics such as the flexible nature, regional outreach and opportunities provided to complete the programmes while remaining in their work places. However, it is questionable whether these programmes encourage sufficient interactions among teachers and students and students and students which must be the core of any professional training programme.

Quality of teaching will depend on the quality of teachers in the system. Therefore, in some countries, teaching appointments are renewed on the basis of the training programmes participated and the new qualifications acquired by the respective teachers. However, in Sri Lanka it is highly unlikely that teachers will get a second chance in their life time to update their professional competencies. Therefore, it is prime important that all the teacher training programmes conducted using face-to-face, distance and other modes or offered in full time or part time basis, should fulfill the requirements of the teachers as well as the training needs of the schools.

In line with the above need, the Faculty of Education of the Open University of Sri Lanka has introduced a number of strategies such as interactive day schools and workshops, practical assignments, school based mentoring system and school based projects to improve the quality of the training provided for teachers using distance mode. This paper focuses on the school mentoring system introduced in 2009 to strengthen the school support and to provide a close supervision and guidance to student teachers who are following the PGDE Programme which is one of the most popular programmes in the University.

2. Pertinent Literature

During the past two centuries, a number of new changes occurred in the way leaning was perceived by psychologists of learning. According to Behaviorism, learner responded to external stimuli and learned through processes of classical and operant conditioning. Cognitivism focused on the internal processes of the learner such as problem solving, critical thinking and discovery learning which led to change the mental structure of the learner. Social constructivism acknowledges the importance of the role of the others and of the interaction with them as the most important factors facilitating one's learning. According to this theory, the learning experience is more effective, when the learner is actively directing his own experience. The more learning is done together with others, the better the process of exploring , defining, explaining, validating and sharing one's understanding of concepts. Learning is enhanced through continuous feedback from peers as well as from experienced people. Further, learning requires an organization structure that offers opportunities to absorb, produce, enrich ad apply knowledge, to share that knowledge and to rethink and revise such knowledge. In line with this theory, it is necessary to change the school into a learning place for student teachers with the support of the principals and other teachers in the school.

One mechanism to increase the involvement of the school is to appoint a 'Mentor' from the school itself to facilitate the development of professional competencies of student teachers who are enrolled in a teacher training programme. In the Greek mythology Mentor is the name of Ulysses' friend who was asked to care of Ulysses' son during his wonderings. Goddess Athene also used to transform herself in to the shape of Mentor to help the same person in times of troubles. So the protection of gods is imposed on him by a mentor. The concept of mentoring originated in Sri Lanka under the title " Upadyaya" where an experienced teacher provided the necessary advice and guidance to a less experienced person in all aspects of one's life. In general, mentoring is perceived as 'a learning partnership between two persons within an institutional learning environment'.

According to Tomilson (1995) Mentors are skilled educators who actively assist less experienced educators to obtain the expected experience and skills. Mentoring is used to make new comers aware of how a specific work place operates. Having focused on the teaching profession, Mclntyre and Hagger (1996: 121) introduced that as a mentor more experienced person facilitates the professional development of a new teacher or someone new to a particular stage in the career.

Mentoring happens in teacher education serving different purposes in line with the requirements of different contexts. Maynard and Furlong (1994) identified three basic models of mentoring: the apprenticeship model, the competency model and the reflective model. The apprenticeship model is applied in the early stage of practical teaching where trainee teacher work alongside mentors who act as models and interpreters to help the trainees see the complexity of the Teaching Learning process. In the second stage of practical teaching, Mentors take on the role of the trainers and instructors to engage the trainee in a more systematic training programme that involves routine of observation and feedback on agreed competencies. In line with the reflective model during the final stage of practical teaching, mentors take the role of co-enquirers to promote critical reflection on teaching and learning in the trainees. However, all three models have some features in common:
- Mentoring takes place in a personal one-to-one relationship.
- A protected (social) room for learning is provided to serve psycho-social functions.
- A confidential, inspiring and trusting relationship is a basic pre-requisite for learning.
- The benefit is not only on the mentees side but also on the mentor's and the institution as well (Fischer and Andel (2002)

The role of the mentors has been defined by many people in many different ways. As explained by Portner (1998) the primary role of the mentor is to enable mentees to reach the expected levels. Pointer further stresses that the relationship between mentor and mentee should be built on mutual trust, respect and professionalism. Relating behaviors create an environment conducive for mentors to understand mentees ideas, needs and encourage honest sharing and reflecting of their experiences. Shea (1992) describes mentoring as " a developmental, caring, sharing, and helping relationship where one person invests time, know-how, and effort in enhancing another person's growth, knowledge and skills and responds to critical needs in the life of that person in ways that prepare the individual for greater productivity or achievement in the future". This definition has broadened the scope of mentoring and given an insight into the personal qualities of both mentors and mentees. Further, Tomlinson (1995) identified two major roles of a mentor as follows:
- the effective coach, challenging and stimulating students' motivation and commitment
- the effective facilitator, supporting teaching skills including counseling.

This emphasis is prime important for building of a mutual partnership and trust between Mentors and mentees. Mentors are able to share their knowledge with mentees (Boyle & Boice , 1998: 161& Stephenson & Sampson 1994:117) and Mentor and mentee relationship enables mentees to become aware of their potential and to be successful in teaching (Boyle and Boice 1998: 162).However, Martin (

1996) found that Mentors do not take over the task of evaluating and assessing students' teaching performance because this role is in constant conflict with the supporting role.

It was evident from the literature that Mentors themselves have diverse perceptions of their roles. Elliott and Calderhead (1994) mention the roles of guide and leader, of a good friend, a listener, of someone enabling somebody in the classroom management or as an organizer of experience of a novice teacher. Some others stress the functions of counseling, coaching, supporting, supervising, taking and giving feedback, problem solving and networking.

On the other hand, mentors would benefit from their roles as providers of probationer induction within school in certain aspects:

- they gain constructive feedback on their own teaching while modeling different instructional methodologies
- they experience peer supervision while providing regular observation and feedback to the mentees
- they gain curriculum management expertise while working on the introduction o curriculum material
- they take part in critical reflection while engaging in classroom research
- they gain experience in educational consultancy while acting as consultant to mentees (Turner 1993, 39)

Further, mentoring is a vital investment in the development of mentors and mentees as well as the institutions involved (Maharasoa, 2001:61) . Thus it can be defined as " a process; a supportive relationship; a helping process; a teaching-leaning process; a reflective process; a career development process; a formalized process and a role constructed by or for mentors (Roberts, 2000, 145)

There is a trend to identify the role of mentors in line with five dimensions of mentoring.

1. **Relationship dimension of mentoring - a deep relationship between mentor and mentees**

Gehrke (1988,) mentoring as " gift giving"

Composed of four characteristic phases:

The Mentor creating the gift

The protégé awakened from being given the mentor's gift of wisdom: the protégé committed to labour to achieve a personal transformation: and the protégé becoming a mentor and passing the gift to a new recipient

2. **Developmental dimension of mentoring – focus on promoting the professional and personal development of both mentors and mentees.**

This is emphasized by Healy and Welchet (1990)- conceptualized mentoring as " a dynamic reciprocal relationship in work environment between an advanced career incumbent (Mentor) and a beginner (protégé) aimed at promoting the career development of both (p 17). Mclntyre and Hagger (1993) distinguished between thee versions of mentoring based on level of expertise offered by Mentors.

3. **Minimal version- mentors provide ordinary supervision to beginning teachers to develop their knowledge and skills**
4. **Developed version- mentors help teachers effect on their ideas and practices , share their ideas and experience with beginning teachers and advise on beginning teachers practice**
5. **Extended version- beginning teacher learning is extended beyond classroom teaching to issues of whole school and community concerns,**

The analysis of these dimensions has been very useful in identifying the functions and responsibilities of school mentors in the present study.

In 2003, having conducted a comprehensive literature review, Fischer ( )suggested that the relevance of Australian 5 C model of mentoring : co-operation, criteria-orientation, continuity, context-related and creativity ; to be further studied in line with the national standards of teacher education. Fischer & Andel (2002) having analysed the experience gained in a project, suggest that the learning partnership of the two persons; mentor and mentee, embodies a considerable advantage to promote a single school culture as well as personal and professional growth. However, Donnelly presented a case study on mentoring in

Initial Teacher Education in Scotland to raise the question whether they really apply mentoring or merely mentor like activity to mentors who support B. Ed students to complete school placements satisfactorily. Therefore, it can be concluded that there are no unanimous conclusions about the positive impact of mentoring programmes on the professional development of student teachers. However, both theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in this part shed light on to the present study which looked at the impact of school mentors on the development of professional skills of student teachers.

3. The present study

The student teachers who are enrolled in the PGDE Programme are graduates having a teaching appointment in a government or private school. The completion of the programme leads to advancement of their career and to increase their salaries. Therefore, a large number of student teachers apply for this programme and it is the largest programme conducted by the Faculty. Due to limited places available in the programme, seniority and the marks obtained for a selection test are considered as prior requirements to enroll in the programme. Therefore, they are not trainee teachers who will be getting teaching appointments after completing the programme.

However, it was observed that the experience gained in the teaching profession prior to training act as a barrier for changing attitudes and developing necessary teaching skills of these teachers through a 15 month programme conducted through the distance mode. Further, the distance nature of the programme also limits the close interaction between tutors and student teachers providing limited opportunities for modeling and partnerships. Therefore, a number of strategies have introduced to the teaching practice component of the PGDE Programme with the aim of improving the quality of the professional training provided for student teachers through the distance mode.

Mentoring is one of the components introduced by the Faculty of Education to strengthen the support and guidance provided for developing teaching competencies of teachers within their own schools and to improve the quality of the training provided. There were two main assumptions that underline the appointment of School Mentors.

- The development of personality characteristics of the student teachers should be the main responsibility of School Mentors. Further, these School Mentors should liaise with the school principals and other teachers in the school to create a conducive and friendly learning environment for student teachers.
- Student teachers should make significant contributions for the development of their schools (core-curricular activities) under the guidance and advice of School Mentors. Monitoring of the involvement of the student teachers should be a part of the internal monitoring process of the schools also. Student teachers had been continuing teaching in their classrooms paying less attention to co-curricular activities which directly have an impact on the development of the schools. Therefore, through the new mentoring system, participation in co-curricular activities was made compulsory for the student teachers.

In line with this project, the roles of School Mentors have been defined by integrating both relationship and development dimensions (Gehrke, 1988) which show a heavy bearing on social constructivism theory. They are:

- To support the development of personality characteristics of student teachers through maintaining a close and congruent relationship
- To maintain a conducive and friendly environment within the school to facilitate the learning process of student teachers
- To monitor the involvement of student teachers in the co-curricular activities through a project aimed at resolving a current problem in school

It was initially planned to implement the school mentoring system to student teachers in schools in the Western Province though later it had to be expanded to all student teachers enrolled in the programme in 2009/10 academic year. Therefore, the present article is based on the data collected in the Western Province as well as in some other provinces by the time that the article was written.

The selection and appointment of a School Mentor was done through the nominations of school principals under some specific guidelines. They should possess PGDE qualifications or above and more than five years of experience as a teacher, demonstrate a strong commitment to teaching and a good relationship with teachers in the school and play an active role in developing co-curricular activities in the school.

In schools where a qualified teacher is not available, the opportunity was given to identify a Mentor from a close by school in consultation with the principal. However, these cases were very rare in the Western Province.

All the School Mentors have been given two days training about the programme objectives, the new mechanism, their specific roles and responsibilities as School Mentors and the procedures adopted by the Faculty to maximize the contribution of Mentors and the school project introduced to improve participation of student teachers in core-curricular activities of the schools. A variety of interactive and participatory methods were adopted in the training workshops to inculcate a positive attitude towards the new approach and to develop necessary competencies needed to perform the duties and responsibilities as school mentors.

Having introduced the new mechanism, a research study was conducted aiming at examining the contributions made by school mentors on the development of personality characteristics and professional competencies of student teachers and maintaining a conducive environment within the school to facilitate their learning. The involvement of student teachers in the co-curricular activities of their respective schools under the guidance of school mentors was also investigated as a secondary objective. In addition, the problems experienced by all categories of people in implementing new activities and making suggestions for their improvement were also considered as additional objectives in this study.

Multi-methods were used for collecting data in this study. They included reflective journals maintained by student teachers and School Mentors, progress reports submitted by mentors at the beginning and at the end of Teaching Practice Stage 1 about the student teachers activities and interviews conducted with School Mentors (53) , Student Teachers (53) and School Principals (30). Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used as necessary to analyze the data collected in this study.

4. Findings of the present study

4.1. Background characteristics of School Mentors

The background characteristics of School Mentors were identified through the bio-data forms sent by them to the Faculty. As Tables 1and 2 illustrates, all the mentors possess a Bachelor's degree with post graduate qualifications or B. Ed and the majority have more than 11 years of teaching experience . Nearly 65% of school mentors were women who had either a female or male student teacher as the mentee. When identifying the School Mentors with the support of school principals it was stressed that they should not have additional responsibilities which would limit themselves in performing their roles in a successful and effective manner. However, according to the information collected, nearly 25% of School Mentors were having responsibilities other than their teaching load.

Table 1- Educational and Professional qualifications of the School Mentors

Educational Qualifications	Professional Qualifications	
	PGDE	Other
B. A	17	
B.Sc	10	
B. Ed		O4
MA/ MEd	19	

Other	03	

Table 2 - Years of Experience of School Mentors

No. years	Responses of the mentors
0-10	05
11-20	11
20-30	20
Above 30	17
Total	53

During the school visits, student teachers and principals stated that the School mentors are knowledgeable, co-operative, very committed and capable to carry out their responsibilities. Further, they revealed that the majority of School Mentors have demonstrated very high leadership capabilities and good social relationships with others. However there were a small number of instances where student teachers were placed with Mentors who were insufficiently skilled in mentoring and in a very few cases, Master Teachers had to perform the mentor's role also due to unavailability of qualified and experienced teachers in the same school to perform as School l Mentors

4.2. Development of Personality Characteristics of Student Teachers

The major aim of appointing School Mentors was to support the development of personality characteristics of student teachers through maintaining a close and congruent relationship with them. It was further expected that a caring, sharing, and helping relationship will be maintained among the Mentor and mentee through which some improvements in the school would take place. In this study, the evaluation forms completed by School Mentors prior to and after Teaching Practice Stage I and reflective journals of both mentors and student teachers were used to assess the improvements taken place in personality characteristics of student teachers.

The following Table 3 shows that some School Mentors had given a lower (1. To be developed) or moderate level rating (2. Satisfactory) for student teachers' personality characteristics which needed further improvement during teaching practice period. For example, a substantial number of student teachers had shown lower or moderate skills in understanding individual differences of students, maximizing the utilization of available resources in the school, co-operating with principals to complete their administrative responsibilities, contributing to school administration and involving in co-curricular activities. On the contrary, School Mentors had given a higher level of rating (3. Very satisfactory) only for two characteristics: their intention to further leaning and relationship with other teachers. This reveals that the student teachers following the PGDE Programme very much needed the support and guidance to improve their personality characteristics.

Table 3- Personality Characteristics of Student Teachers prior to TP 1

Statements	1	2	3
Daily Attendance	12	22	19
Punctuality (to school and to relevant lessons)	16	21	16
Commitment to teaching	12	28	13
Understanding about students/individual differences	17	26	10
Knowledge in the relevant subject areas	09	28	16
Co-operation given to Principal/Sectional Head	21	22	10

	1	2	3
Relationship with students	11	24	18
Relationship with other teachers in the school	07	23	22
Intention to further learning	10	19	24
Contribution to school administration	12	32	9
Involvement in co-curricular activities	15	24	14
Maximum utilization of available resources in the school	22	24	7
Being an example to others (Good moral conduct)	12	29	12

1. To be developed   2. Satisfactory   3. Very satisfactory

Having analyzed the evaluation forms completed by the School Mentors at the end of Teaching Practice Stage I the following improvements could be identified in the personality characteristics of student teachers. As illustrated in Table 4, there is a substantial improvement in a number of characteristics of student teachers such as in their daily attendance, punctuality, knowledge in relevant subject areas, commitment to teaching, understanding about student differences, relationship with other teachers and students and involvement in co-curricular activities in the school at the end of Teaching Practice. The maximization of available resources in the school was one of the weakest areas of student teachers under study. In relation to five characteristics, none of the student teachers received a lower level rating from their School Mentors. Their reflective journals also confirm that those changes have been taken place due to support and close guidance received from their School Mentors. Therefore, it is clear that the School Mentors have created a positive change in the personality characteristics of student teachers.

Table 4- Personality Characteristics after Teaching Practice Stage 1

Statements	1	2	3
Daily Attendance	---	18	35
Punctuality (to school and to relevant lessons)	---	16	37
Commitment to teaching	---	15	38
Understanding about students/individual differences	---	17	36
Knowledge in the relevant subject areas	02	19	34
Co-operation given to Principal/Sectional Head	05	22	26
Relationship with students	03	19	31
Relationship with other teachers in the school	04	16	33
Intention to further learning	03	19	21
Contribution to school administration	05	22	26
Involvement in co-curricular activities	03	18	32
Maximum utilization of available resources in the school	08	24	21
Being an example to others (Good moral conduct)	---	24	29

Strategies adopted by the School Mentors to improve the characteristics of student teachers

As indicated by the School Mentors, there were specific strategies adopted by them to create a positive change in the personality characteristics of student teachers. Those strategies are indicated here according to their order of prominence.

1. Provide advice and guidance - 75%   2. Increase awareness of student teachers- 70%

3. Inculcate positive attitudes- 60%   4. Advice to take part in co-curricular activities 56%

5. Motivate and reward them – 52%   6. Share experience – 40%

7. Maintain a very close relationship – 39% 8. Monitoring and supervision very closely- 35%

9. Become an example to student teachers -33% 10. Direct them to work with some experienced teachers -18%

The percentages were calculated on the basis of the number of School Mentors responded for the particular items. According to the above information, the most popular strategies used by the School Mentors were providing advice and guidance and increasing awareness about the personality characteristics. However, the effectiveness of those strategies was not very clear.

The reflective journals of both student teachers and School Mentors also provided sufficient evidence to prove that School Mentors are having a strong positive impact on the development of personality characteristics of student teachers. The relevant statements found in both School Mentors and student teachers journals are given below;

Table 5. Comments made by student teachers and School Mentors

Positive Comments made by student teachers	*Positive comments made by School mentors*
I have experienced a complete change in my behavior due to my mentors advice and support	*I was very happy to see the progress made by my student teacher*
My mentor had become a good role model to me	*The close relationship maintained among us helped a lot to create a long lasting change*
I have changed a lot during Teaching Practice Stage I with the support of my mentor	*My student teacher was really motivated to change his behavior*
I was able to achieve a substantial progress under my mentor's guidance	*I was always behind her when she needed support*
I was really motivated to complete my responsibilities in a satisfactory manner because of my mentor's influence	*My student teacher was very clever and enthusiastic to learn new things*
My mentor always tried to maintain a close relationship with me which lead to change my attitudes about teaching	*My student teacher always trusted me and honored me*

However, the school mentoring mechanism which was introduced on a trial basis in 2009 for the first time for the student teachers enrolled in the PGDE Programme experienced some difficulties.

1. The heavy administrative workload of some School Mentors did not permit them to work fulltime with student teachers in order to create a positive change in their personality characteristics.

2. In a few rural schools, nobody qualified to be appointed as a School Mentor. Further, in some cases, it was not even possible to get the service of an experienced teacher from a close by school due to unavailability of transport facilities. As a result, some student teachers were left in their schools without having any support and guidance from a School Mentor. The arrangements that could be made in a situation like this were to ask the Master Teacher to provide additional support or to ask them to identify a colleague as a peer counselor.

3. It was not possible to introduce an incentive mechanism for School Mentors due to financial constraints. This might have acted as a barrier for getting the fullest contribution of the School Mentors to the success of this project.

Due to these difficulties, one can argue that the mentoring mechanism may not have led to achieve its intended objectives fully.

4.3. Maintaining a friendly and conducive environment within the school

One of the main purposes of appointing School Mentors was to fill the gaps created by appointing Master Teachers outside the school for supervising five lessons of student teachers during Teaching Practice Stage I. Further, it was expected that the respective schools would also benefit through the close congruence relationship maintained between School Mentors and Student Teachers. Therefore, during the random school visits (30 schools) of internal academics, the student teachers, School Mentors and School Principals were asked to give their opinion on the friendly and conducive environment created by the Mentors. The ideas expressed by the relevant categories about the contributions made by School Mentors of people are illustrated in Table 6:

Table 6. Comments made on the contribution of School Mentors

Comments made by Student Teachers	Comments made by School Mentors
My ,mentor tried her best to provide a facilitating environment for me	*I tried to solve most of the problems of student teacher within the school*
My mentor changed the attitudes of other teachers to give due recognition to me	*I had to intervene when my student teacher had problems with the other teachers*
Most of my problems within the school were solved by my mentor	*Student teachers need the support from an experienced teacher to solve problems within the school*
It is always good to have someone close by to give emotional support	*Our principal was convinced when I explained the support he could give to the student teacher*
My mentor acted like a mediator between me and the principal	*When the problems within the school are solved permanently student teachers would improve their teaching*

The majority were happy about the support received from School Mentors to create a facilitative and friendly environment to student teachers and highlighted how it had helped the student teachers to improve their motivation and commitment towards the school activities.

Pincipals' comments about the support received from mentor

Mentor was able to give her fullest support within the school

Student teachers had less problems when someone was there to look after them

Student teachers completed TP with less problems within the school

The intervention of the school mentor within the school was a very positive approach

However, there were problems faced by school mentors when creating a friendly and conducive environment within the school.
1. Lack of commitment and determination of student teachers
2. Resistance from the school community to change the routine procedures
3. Lack of goodwill and commitment of other teachers to support student teachers
4. Lack of training received to perform mentors roles

4.4. Involvement of student teachers in co-curricular activities through a project

For the first time in the OUSL history, a school based project was introduced to the PGDE Programme by the Faculty. This was a novel experience for the University academics as well as the school mentors and Master teachers though many overwhelmingly accepted it as a very worthwhile and meaningful strategy. Principals (70%) were of the opinion that school projects positively contributed to the development of infrastructure and co-curricular activities of schools. As reported in the student teachers' and mentors' reflective journals this mechanism has provided a very good platform for experimenting various innovative ideas. Among the projects completed by student teachers, there were 'value trees', herbal gardens, landscaping projects, class libraries, exhibitions, debating campaigns, wall magazines, nutrition programmes, literacy programmes, quiz competitions, musical programmes, wall paintings, Science and Mathematics days and many more which contributed to the improvement of the school. Some mentors (44%) have managed to convince the school principals to facilitate this process by providing financial assistance through quality inputs. Comments made by student teachers and principals and other teachers about the projects are listed in the Table 7.

Table 7 - Comments made about the project

Positive comments	Negative comments (principals and other teachers)
There is a substantial improvement in our school due to my project	Student teachers were enthusiastic about co-curricular activities during TP period only
Students were actively engaged in the project	I had to face several administrative problems due to project activities
There is an attitudinal change among students due to my project	Other teachers have different criticisms about the projects
My project work improved the co-operation among the staff members	Student teachers do not have clear idea about the project
The involvement of students in co-curricular activities has been improved	Students had problems in finding money for school projects

However, there was evidence that both student teachers and school mentors had difficulties in preparing reflective journals about the completed activities of the projects. According to some student teachers they

were over burdened with numerous responsibilities in the school during Teaching Practice period and the project further magnified their problem. School mentors had problems (38%) with lack of interest, initiation and commitment of student teachers. Some student teachers and School Mentors pointed out that limited facilities available in the schools acted as a barrier for selection of innovative and novel projects. Further, there were numerous difficulties faced by both student teachers and school mentors due to unforeseen problems in the schools.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This research study revealed that the school mentors have a strong positive impact on the development of personality characteristics of student teachers. They were able to change student teachers' attitudes towards teaching and learning, improve their relationship with students and other teachers and involvement in administrative procedures and co-curricular activities. School mentors have tried to maintain a very close congruence relationship with student teachers which led to improve their self-confidence and to reduce many problems faced by them within the school. The developments taken place within the school through some innovative projects introduced by the student teachers were above the expected level. Therefore, it could be concluded that School Mentors had provided more than the ordinary supervision to their student teachers to develop their professional competencies in a meaningful and very effective manner. In other words, four important dimensions suggested by Gehrke (1988) namely the developed dimension, extended dimension, relationship dimension and developmental dimension could be made functional through this mechanism. It was clear that the vision of mentoring depends on school-mentor and University partnership that support the professional development of both mentors and student teachers.

However, this study had revealed some problems arisen due to the new mentoring mechanism introduced by the Faculty of Education, Open University of Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is essential that the Faculty should take immediate steps to review the whole process and introduce both long term and short term solutions to the problems faced by all categories of people involved. It is also important to mention here that the Faculty has already taken steps to introduce a payment scheme to School Mentors for the valuable contributions they would make towards the development of professional competencies of student teachers and a monitoring procedure to stream line the process.

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